

Parkman House (Tuckerman-Parkman House)
33 Beacon Street
Boston
Suffolk County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-965

HABS
MASS,
13-BOST,
116-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Index to Photographs

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George Cushing, photographer, August 1968

MA-965-1	SOUTH (FRONT) ELEVATION
MA-965-2	NORTH ELEVATION OF ATTACHED STABLE SHOWING ENTRANCE FROM ALLEY
MA-965-3	DINING ROOM, FRONT ROOM ON FIRST FLOOR
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
TUCKERMAN-PARKMAN HOUSE HABS NO. MASS-965

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116-

Location: 33 Beacon Street, Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts
(Beacon Hill)
Geographic Location Code: 20-0120-025
Latitude: 42°21'26" N. Longitude: 71°03'55" W.

Present Owner: City of Boston

Present Occupant: Boston Park Department

Present Use: Offices of the Boston Park Department

Statement of Significance: This is a large, elegant building, typical of the Beacon Hill houses of the early nineteenth century. It is one of a group of three row houses built at the same time with identical facades, and is important as a harmonious part of the architectural context of Beacon Hill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The house was built on land that was originally part of the Hancock estate; the Hancock house was located a short distance to the east. Israel Thorndike began buying out the Hancock heirs in the summer of 1821, and in turn, sold the land on which this and the adjoining houses stand to John Hubbard in May, 1823. Hubbard, active in developing this area, built the three adjoining houses, 32, 33 and 34 Beacon Street, at the same time. In May, 1823, he was assessed for these three houses, as yet unfinished. The 1825 assessment indicates that the houses were finished, but the stables still unfinished. By the 1826 assessment, they were also completed. In September, 1825, number 33 was purchased by Edward Tuckerman from Hubbard for \$35,000. In 1853, at Tuckerman's death, it was sold to the widow of Dr. George Parkman for \$40,000. Parkman's son George, who died in 1908, bequeathed the house to the City of Boston as part of his very large endowment of the City's parks.
2. Date of erection: 1823-25.
3. Architect: The house was probably designed by Cornelius Coolidge. Coolidge (1778-1843) was a self-made businessman, real-estate developer, builder and architect. He is known to have been closely associated with Hubbard during the years 1824-29, and was probably the architect and builder for this house, as well as Hubbard's other building projects during this period.

4. Alterations and additions: The east window on the second floor, opening onto the balcony, was widened. Photographic evidence indicates that this occurred before 1860. The window was returned to its original form in the early twentieth century. Evidence of the alteration is apparent on the interior. The interior of the house has been altered for office use.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Parkmans were descendants of an old and wealthy Boston merchant family. George Parkman's father, Dr. George Parkman, a Harvard professor, was the victim of one of the most sensational murders of the nineteenth century. His colleague, John White Webster, was convicted of the crime on the basis of circumstantial evidence after a highly-publicized trial which has gone down in the annals of American legal history. The son, a Harvard graduate who had been leading a rather carefree life in Europe up to that time, returned and occupied this house from 1853 until his death in 1908, becoming more and more recluse. The house was part of Parkman's \$6,000,000 bequest to the City of Boston for the care of its parks.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: There are four views of the house in the photographic file of the Boston Athenaeum: 1 and 2) views of Beacon Street, c. 1860, by Hawes. Hawes' negative numbers are 537 and 356; 3) view of 33 Beacon Street probably taken after 1890 and before 1924; 4) view of 32, 33, and 34 Beacon Street taken before 1924. Views 1, 2, and 3 show the east window, second floor as it was altered. View 4 shows the window in its present form.

2. Bibliography:

Bernstein, Allen. "Cornelius Coolidge, Architect of Beacon Hill Row Houses, 1810-1840," Old Time New England, XXXIX (October, 1948), 45-46.

Chamberlain, Allen. Beacon Hill, Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925, pp. 149-155, 281-284.

Sunday Herald (Boston), February 21, 1915.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a typical example of the large, elegant houses of Beacon Hill in the early nineteenth century.

2. Condition of Fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This row house, about 30 feet wide (three bays), shares party walls with similar houses on both sides. It is four stories high. There is a four-story, one-bay wing at the east rear which connects with a stable. The whole complex is U-shaped.
2. Foundations: Brick and stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick with rusticated, regular ashlar facing on the ground floor.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick party side walls, wood interior framing.
5. Porches: There is a cast-iron balcony across the main facade at the second floor level.
6. Chimneys: There are three chimneys in the party walls.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The recessed main entrance is in the east bay. The stone surround has two Ionic columns in antis.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Wooden double-hung windows on the ground floor have six-over-six-light sash. French doors on the second floor reach from the floor nearly to the ceiling and give access to the balcony. Double-hung windows on the upper floors have later two-over-two-light sash.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: A gable roof with parapet at front.
 - b. Dormers: There are two gabled dormers on the front.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: There is a cellar with brick floor under the front part of the house only. It contains furnace room and coal bins.
 - b. First floor: The entrance in the right-hand bay opens into a small vestibule which leads to the main stair hall.

To the left of the stair hall are two large rooms separated by a small office. The front room, probably the original dining room, retains most of its original finish. The kitchen to the rear has been heavily remodelled. An elevator is located behind the main stairway. Behind it, there is a single room in the rear wing at the rear of which is a service stair.

- c. Second floor: The plan is similar to the first floor. The two principal rooms are double parlors connected by a wide doorway with a pair of sliding doors. There is a small room above the first floor entrance vestibule. The lot slopes to the rear, and the stable is approached through the rear wing of the second floor.
 - d. Third and fourth floors: Wide, deep doorways containing cupboards separated the paired rooms on these two floors. These have been removed on the fourth floor and partially removed on the third.
 - e. Attic: The attic is finished over the main block only and contains three small servants' rooms.
2. Stairways: The main stair is an open-well, open-string stair of oval plan with slender tapered balusters. A simple molded handrail, scrolled at the first floor, runs unbroken by newels through four floors. There is a circular skylight with radiating mullions over the open well. A modern metal service stair is in the rear wing.
 3. Flooring: Many areas are now covered with asphalt tile. There is narrow, hardwood flooring in other areas.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster.
 5. Doorways and doors: Paneled wooden doors have pilaster trim with carved corner blocks. In the south room, second floor, french doors lead to the balcony. The wide doorway between the double parlors has a pair of oversized sliding doors. The opening is framed with Corinthian pilasters. Doorways and doors are now painted white. Principal interior doors are probably of dark, hard wood, such as mahogany.
 6. Trim: Parlor ceilings have modillion cornices. Dining room ceiling is divided into panels by applied plaster moldings.
 7. Hardware: Some simple silver hardware with round knobs survives on the interior doors.
 8. Lighting: There are modern fluorescent ceiling lights throughout the house except in the double parlors where

each room has a chandelier converted to electricity from gas. The chandelier in the front parlor was probably installed soon after the Parkmans acquired the house. The chandelier in the rear parlor is older, perhaps contemporary with the house.

9. Heating: There are fireplaces in most of the principal rooms. Those in the dining room, the double parlors, and the room above the entrance vestibule are most notable and have elaborately carved or paneled marble mantles.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south-southeast, the center one of three adjoining row houses which face Boston Common across Beacon Street.
2. Outbuildings:
 - a. Stable: The attached stable, mentioned in the tax assessments of 1825 and 1826, survives with very few apparent alterations. The lot slopes up to the rear so that the stable is approached from the second floor of the house. The one-and-a-half story building has brick walls with openings for doors and windows framed in granite. Double wooden doors open to the main level from the alley at the rear. There is a wooden floor and wood and plaster walls. A broad skylight with wooden sides rises through the high attic. Any partitions or stalls have been removed. The attic or hay mow is approached by ladder through the side of the skylight passage. Sliding wooden shutters on the sides of the skylight admit light to the attic. An arched doorway for lifting hay and grain into the attic from the alley is above the doorway to the main level. The attic also contains carefully made wooden bins for storing grain. A wooden ventilating duct with wooden dampers and grills runs across the ceiling of the lower level, up through the attic, and empties at the top of the skylight.
 - b. Privy: A privy opens off the short passageway that connects the stable with the rear wing of the house. It appears to date from the original building of the house and is unaltered. The simple wooden bench with three graduated seats empties into a brick lined well, about 15' to 20' deep. Walls and ceilings are plaster. There is one window.

- c. Walks, enclosures: A small garden is enclosed by the main block, the rear wing, the stable, and the adjoining house to the west. The house is approached directly from the sidewalk at the front. The stable is entered through the alley at the rear.

Prepared by Osmund Overby
Project Director
National Park Service
August 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1968 Boston Summer Project undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Old South Meeting House Association, the Town of Barnstable, Massachusetts, and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. During the summer records were made of eight historic buildings in Boston and vicinity.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Dr. Osmund Overby of the University of Missouri. Team Supervisor was Professor Woodrow W. Wilkins of the University of Miami. Student Assistant Architects who prepared the measured drawings for the project were William L. McQueen (University of Illinois), Charles D. Matter (Rhode Island School of Design), Barbara Stokey (Carnegie-Mellon University), and Noré V. Winter (Tulane University). Photographers Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia and George Cushing of Boston made the documentary photographs.

ADDENDUM TO:
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FIELD RECORDS

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1849 C Street NW
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